

3 for 3: Dordt Gets Engagement Award Third Year in a Row

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3 FOR 3

DORDT GETS ENGAGEMENT AWARD THIRD YEAR IN A ROW

President Erik Hoekstra was sitting in an auditorium at New York University with other senior leaders in U.S. higher education when the *Wall Street Journal* and *Times Higher Education* announced that Dordt College had, for the third year in a row, been named number one in the nation for student engagement. Hoekstra had been invited to participate in the U.S. Student Success Forum and to be present when the rankings were made public.

At a panel discussion during the summit, Hoekstra and administrative officials from Washington University in St. Louis, New York University, and the University of South Florida shared strategies for improving student engagement.

"Dordt was the only Christian college on any of the panels throughout the day, and we were certainly the smallest school," says Hoekstra.

THE RANKINGS

The *Wall Street Journal* and *Times Higher Education* created the college rankings based on four pillars that emphasize key areas in teaching excellence: resources, environment, outputs, and engagement. The engagement category comprises 20 percent of the overall score and considers if a college or university effectively engages with its students. Specifically, it examines:

- The level of interaction that students have with faculty and other students while on campus
- The students' engagement in learning and critical thinking
- The likelihood that students will recommend the college to others
- The number of subjects and accredited programs available.



To learn more about the *Wall Street Journal* and *Times Higher Education* rankings, visit 3for3.dordt.edu.

EMMA DARWIN



At the panel session, President Erik Hoekstra shared the stage with Mark Wrigton, chancellor of Washington University in St. Louis; Ralph Wilcox, provost at the University of South Florida; Katherine Fleming, provost at New York University; and Phil Baty, panel moderator.

Phil Baty, editorial director of the *Times Higher Education* global rankings and panel moderator, pointed out that “Dordt College, a highly distinctive Christian institution, scores highest on our student engagement survey, based on 200,000 responses from current U.S. students.” He asked Hoekstra to explain “the institutional culture that has produced such strongly engaged students, and the policies in place to support students.”

“It’s about our compelling mission and our common purpose,” says Hoekstra. “As we go about our work together, our faculty spend extra time with our students to serve them not only academically, but emotionally, spiritually, and socially. When

faculty act in that manner, students notice and respond positively. It’s that unified commitment to our core mission—namely, ‘to work effectively for Christ-centered renewal in every area of life’—which makes the engagement so strong at Dordt.”

Following his panel session, Hoekstra says that audience members thanked him for sharing his perspective as a Christian and as a president of a small college.

“When people from historic and prestigious schools have looked at Dordt’s website ahead of time and want to hear about the ‘secret sauce’ we have

at Dordt, it’s a salt and light time for us,” tweeted Hoekstra while at the forum.

The goal of the U.S. Student Success Forum was to explore ways schools can engage and support students’ learning by hearing from institutions which, they say, “teach students better instead of just teaching better students.” Hoekstra heard examples of how larger universities like

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Michigan State University and Georgia State University try to engage with students and how difficult that can be for schools who have tens of thousands of undergraduates. Still, some institutions are getting creative: Dartmouth College has started a pilot program of 60 students, using cell phone technology and artificial intelligence to monitor whether students are eating, exercising, and having conversations with other students.

“I think that Dordt’s advantage is our ability to engage with students on a personal level,” says Hoekstra. He believes that the personalized attention Dordt students receive is what has earned the college its top ranking in student engagement for three years in a row.

Kaysha Steiger, a sophomore business major at Dordt, has experienced that personal attention in her interactions with her professors.

“Dordt students feel like they really matter to their professors,” says Steiger. “And Dordt staff members do a great job of getting students involved in on-campus activities throughout the year. I’ve found that Dordt is a place that puts community first.”

Dr. Elizabeth (Vander Ziel, ’03) Blankespoor, the 2018 Horizon Award recipient, recalls how integral her experience at Dordt was in growing her faith and helping her mature.

“At Dordt, you have time to interact with people in a meaningful way and challenge each other to think about what we want out of life and how faith fits into that,” says Blankespoor. “A Dordt

The student engagement ranking considers to what extent students have the opportunity to interact with faculty and whether the college provides collaborative learning experiences.



Faculty Notes

Dr. Jan Van Vliet, professor of economics, was elected this past June to the board of directors of Soccer Chaplains United (SCU). SCU is a group of chaplains and counselors that serve two major league soccer teams as well as teams within the USL and other schools. Van Vliet's role is to advise the executive director on educational, credentialing, and ordination requirements for potential chaplains and counselors.

Dr. Channon Visscher, associate professor of chemistry and planetary sciences, worked with researchers from NASA to study ultra-hot Jupiters: planets that orbit so close to their host stars that they burn on the "day" side while staying cool on the "night" side. Their research was featured in a NASA press release to help scientists understand the fascinating chemistry of these scorched worlds.

Dr. Bruce Vermeer, professor of psychology, presented a workshop titled "Neuropsychological Aspects of Aging: Implications for Assessment & Intervention." His workshop was part of the annual conference of the South Dakota Psychological Association in Sioux Falls.



Jacob Van Wyk, professor emeritus of art, will mount a large art exhibit called "Apocalyptic Vision" in November at Northwestern College. This exhibit features more than 40 works from the past 35 years in various media, including lithographic prints and etchings, oil pastel drawings, and clay sculptures. The artwork explores subjects such as the mystery of angelic presences, life and death, and biblical imagery of the end times. Over the next two years this exhibit will also be mounted at Mount Marty College, Morningside College, and the University of Sioux Falls.



"I love the camaraderie of this place," says Dr. David Mulder. "Dordt has a very strong faculty, and it's a blessing to serve alongside colleagues who challenge me to live out my faith in my teaching practice on a day-by-day basis."

education is designed to challenge us to think deeply about what it means to be a Christian."

Dr. David Mulder, an education professor at Dordt, says that faculty, staff, and administrators view their work as a calling and an opportunity to serve students.

"Dordt students are amazing," says Mulder. "Most students who come to Dordt are looking to be stretched, and that's a big part of what we are about as faculty: not giving students pat answers to challenging questions, but wrestling through thorny issues along with our students and examining them through the lens of a Reformed worldview."

Dr. Leah Zuidema, associate provost, agrees.

"Year after year I continue to be impressed with the passion and expertise that our faculty and staff bring to Dordt," says Zuidema. "They want to

be part of a transformative experience for students. They care deeply about our students, pay attention to what interests them, and challenge them to keep growing."

Dordt was not the only Christian institution to be ranked highly in student engagement; Oklahoma Baptist University, Cedarville University, and Harding University were also ranked in top spots for engagement.

"In the broader culture, I think that's a wonderful witness to the fact that students and faculty are created as image-bearers," says Hoekstra. "The first question posed in Dordt's Educational Framework is, 'Who owns your heart?' When Christian institutions can talk at the heart level, we're able to more directly address ultimate things that matter. I think that's what gets students more engaged."

SARAH MOSS ('10)